DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 249 595 EA 017 120

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TITLE The California Mentor Teacher Program.
PUB DATE Jun 84
NOTE 6p.; In: Making Our Schools More Effective: Proceedings of Three State Conferences." See EA 017 101.
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Differentiated Staffs; Elementary Secondary Education; *Master Teachers; Program Development; School District Autonomy; *Staff Development; Staff Utilization; State Aid; *State Legislation; *State Programs; Teacher Administrator Relationship; Teacher Educator Education; *Teacher Improvement
IDENTIFIERS California; California Education Code; *California Mentor Teacher Program

ABSTRACT

The California Mentor Teacher Program, brought into being by California Senate Bill 813, is designed to retain and recognize excellent teachers and to improve the profession by enabling expert teachers to assist others. Four major issues to consider in developing mentor teacher programs are discussed. First is the importance of collaboration with appropriate groups in planning, including teachers, governing boards, and administrators. Second, program design should reflect local needs and priorities. Design possibilities include (1) a master teacher to provide staff development; (2) a mentor as a trainer of new teachers; (3) a mentor teacher as a "fellow" in a teacher training academy; or (4) a mentor teacher as a curriculum developer. Third, the criteria for the selection of mentor teachers in the California Mentor Teacher Program are set by the California Education Code, but they allow considerable flexibility to local districts. The Code stipulates only that mentor teachers should have credentials and permanent status, substantial classroom experience, and demonstrated teaching ability. Finally, mentor teachers in their new role may require training and support from site administrators and teachers. Partial state funding has been provided for stipends to mentors. (TE)

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THE CALIFORNIA MENTOR TEACHER PROGRAM

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Thank you very much for inviting me to speak on the Mentor Teacher Program in California. This is an exciting time in education, nationally, and particularly here in California where Senate Bill 813--an omnibus educational reform package passed the Legislature this summer.

The bill is one of the most comprehensive education finance and reform measures ever enacted in California, and contains over 80 separate reforms designed to:

- Strengthen high school graduation requirements.
- Improve the elementary and secondary curriculum.
- Tighten student discipline standards.
- Streamline teacher dismissal procedures.
- Improve school-level management.
- Attract and retain high quality staff.

In 1983, Senate Bill 813 provided an 8 percent average increase for school districts, with appropriations totalling over $800 million dollars. And, while much of the 1984-85 funding was cut, the funds which were appropriated are assisting to both implement the reform agenda and offset budget reductions occurring since the passage of Proposition 13.

I mention these other initiatives in the reform package because it's important to address the Mentor Teacher Program within the total package of reforms rather than attempting to implement each piece in isolation. In the area of staff development, the law provides for a new teacher evaluation procedures, credential requirements for teacher trainees, grants to improve and reward classroom instruction and provide stipends for mentor teachers working in a staff development capacity.

There are a variety of teacher incentive plans which have been proposed and enacted in the United States. Tennessee and Florida both have teacher career ladder plans tied to evaluation and salary. These new proposals are supported by smaller scale efforts like the one which has worked quite successfully for 30 years in La Doue, Missouri.

The California Mentor Teacher Program is of a slightly different variety, in that this master teacher proposal, while intending to improve the structure of the teaching profession through a career ladder has a staff development component as its central activity.

The primary goals of the Mentor Teacher Program are twofold:

1. First, to retain and recognize excellent teachers, and

2. Second, to improve the profession by making individuals with particular expertise available to assist others

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These goals are to be accomplished by selecting mentor teachers and designating part of their professional role for staff development with new or experienced teachers. Where appropriate, districts may also have mentor teachers work in curriculum development functions. In return, mentors will receive a $4,000 annual stipend and serve up to three years as "mentors."

Mentors are not selected on the basis of principal evaluation, and they are specifically prohibited from participating in the evaluation of other teachers. Rather, the primary function is to provide a process for teachers to receive assistance in a collegial setting for new and experienced teachers. In addition, mentors may work in curriculum development or with teacher trainees.

The teacher trainee provisions in SB 813/1983 (Sections 25.5, 44325) authorize the Commission on Teacher Credentialing to issue certificates to allow persons with baccalaureate degrees, but no professional training to teach in secondary schools, (grades 7-12). Teacher trainees are to work within a professional development plan and be guided and trained by a mentor teacher.

Mentors are not given additional pay simply because they demonstrate merit. Rather, they are compensated at a higher rate because they perform different duties, and work longer hours than their peers. Neither the teacher trainee nor the mentor teacher provisions are prescriptive. Both are implemented at district discretion. Thus, districts have considerable flexibility to design mentor programs within an overall approach to upgrading instructional quality.

SB 813 authorizes districts to designate up to 5 percent of their teachers as mentors. Undoubtedly, many more teachers could qualify and serve with distinction in the mentor role. Hopefully, this initial authorization for mentor teaching will be a first step in creating a variety of career ladders for classroom teachers. However, current funding levels restrict the number of mentors that can be selected.

The Mentor Teacher Program is a new opportunity and will require thoughtful planning in order to support educational improvement. Given the broad scope of the initiative, it is unreasonable to expect that the program can accomplish all goals; it is thus essential that teachers and administrators work together to define what the program can do. Issues to consider in developing mentor programs include:

1. <u>The importance of collaboration with appropriate groups in program planning</u>. The success of a Mentor Teacher Program will depend in large measure on support and commitment from all those involved--teachers, governing boards, administrators, and other interested parties. District governing boards intending to participate in the mentor program need to work with these groups to establish a collaborative approach to program planning.

2. <u>Program design reflecting local needs and priorities</u>. Staff training activities and support are critical elements for fostering teacher and organizational change, and sustaining these changes in sufficient depth to impact student achievement. However, there is no single unitary system for providing staff development. Thus, how the mentor program is used in individual school districts is expected to vary widely.

Nevertheless, the program should not stand in isolation, but will relate to other initiatives requiring broad-based support from teachers and administrators (School Improvement, AB 551, Student Study Teams). Outlined below are some approaches which have been used in master teacher programs, which might be modified to define "mentoring" roles.

a. Lead teacher or master teacher assigned to provide staff development for school staff. As enrollment has declined and teachers have left the profession, existing staff have often been reassigned to shortage areas and many California teachers are not now working in their primary subject area. A mentor assigned as a lead teacher might help existing staff upgrade their skills in their newly assigned subject areas. In this configuration, a mentor teacher would be assigned as a staff developer at a school site. A mentor might:

   - Provide training, classroom observation, conferencing and coaching support for a group of teachers being retrained.

   - Function as a content and methodology specialist at a school site for designated grade levels or content areas.

   - Teach a regular sequence of courses, and be observed by other teachers

b. Mentor as trainer of new teachers or teacher trainer. The first year of teaching is the most difficult, as research suggests that much of what teachers learn about teaching is learned "on the job." Hence, mentors could work with newly hired fully credentialed teachers to help upgrade their content knowledge, refine their instructional skills, and develop effective classroom management systems. Should a district elect to use teacher trainees, mentors would have a central role in managing a professional development program for these persons.

c. Mentor teacher as "fellow" in teacher training academy. Another approach might be to group mentors in a teaching academy where teachers with particular expertise would constitute a "demonstration" school. Schenley High School in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania provides such an example. This program provides a clinical teaching experience in a regular high school where teachers observe exemplary instructional activities, are able to practice and receive feedback on instructional skills, and receive continued support for using new concepts, skills, and processes in their own instruction.

d. Mentor teacher as "curriculum developer". Finally, mentor teachers may be assigned to develop and install new curriculum materials. There is substantial evidence that the quality of textbooks and instructional materials has declined as students have increasing difficulty in reading materials "at grade level". In addition, there is frequently a mismatch between the classroom text, instructional content and standardized tests. Thus, mentors might be designated to work in the summer or in noninstructional time to develop curriculum and assist in classroom-level implementation.

3. Attention to issues of nomination, observation, and selection. California Education Code Section 44495 defines a nominating process for selecting mentor candidates to be referred to the governing board for designation. The majority of the selection committee is composed of classroom teachers, chosen by other teachers, with the remainder of the committees composed of school administrators. The selection committee is directed to consider involving parents, pupils, or other public representatives in the selection process. The selection process includes provisions for observation of classroom teachers. The final designation of a person as a mentor is by the district governing board.

   Districts have considerable flexibility to define the criteria for mentor teachers. The law provides only that mentors:

   a. Be a credentialed classroom teacher with permanent status (permanent status means tenure in those districts which grant tenure or three years experience in districts which do not grant tenure)

   b. Has substantial recent experience in classroom instruction

   c. Has demonstrated exemplary teaching ability, as indicated by, among other things, effective communication skills, subject matter knowledge, and mastery of a range of teaching strategies necessary to meet the needs of pupils in different context

4. Support for mentor teachers in their new roles. Teaching adults is a significantly different process from teaching children. Adult motivations, habits, attitudes, and skills are different from those of children and need to be accommodated in the training activity. Most mentors will be working as advisors to the teaching process. Hence, if the mentor is to observe and work with teachers in classrooms, the mentor needs expertise in observation, conferencing, and clinical teaching support. If the mentor lacks expertise in these areas, training mentor needs to be provided.

   Commitment from site administrators and teachers for work with the mentor is essential. Mentor teachers are most likely to work with teachers at individual school sites. Observing in classrooms, sharing instructional strategies, modeling teaching ideas, and providing resources will require a strong degree of trust among mentors and site teachers and administrators.

   Reasonable expectations about what mentors can accomplish will also be essential if mentors are to be well used. The law states that not less than 60 percent of mentor's time shall be spent in direct instruction of pupils, but this doesn't preclude individuals from spending more or even all of the time in direct instruction of pupils, (e.g., the "training academy" notion). Further, if mentor teachers are to improve instructional quality, their duties must be thoughtfully planned in light of specific local needs and goals for improving curriculum and instruction.

   Finally, provisions need to be made to ensure that mentors are supported in their new role as supervisors, not as evaluators. As participants in a new activity, mentors will need to be given opportunities where they can share and improve upon their mentoring skills.

Current and future year funding. The Legislature appropriated $10,800,000 for the Mentor Teacher Program for the second half of 1983-84. Full funding of 5 percent of the state's approximately 165,000 full-time certificated teachers would require $49,500,000 or $24,750,000 for half of a year. AB 70/1983 allowed the State Superintendent to decrease the 5 percent percentage multiplier to accommodate current funding levels and allow all interested districts to participate if they choose, but at a reduced number of mentors (estimated to be 2 percent of the state's teachers). Thus, mentors will serve only one half of the 1983-84 school year and the state will apportion $2,000 per mentor for stipends.

Section 26 of AB 70 defines district allowances for administrative costs of participating in the program. At least two-thirds of the funding is to be used for stipends; thus, each district's 1983-84 allocation of funds will reflect a 2:1 relationship, with $1,000 of administrative cost funding for each $2,000 of stipend funding.

Mentor stipends are not to be counted as salary or wages for purposes of calculating employer contribution rates or employee benefits under the State Teacher's Retirement System. Governing board may designate mentor teachers for a period not to exceed three consecutive school years. Upon completing three years as a mentor teacher, an individual may be reviewed and renominated.

In summary, The California Mentor Teacher Program is an important initiative designed to upgrade the quality of instruction. The program provides an exciting opportunity to reward excellence in teaching while implementing the reform mandate we have been given. This is a new program and as such, we have few examples to follow for statewide implementation. Done carefully, with district needs and priorities driving the process, mentor teachers can make a powerful impact. Done poorly, the positive benefits of teachers helping other teachers may be lost in a cloud of minutiae. Thus, we are doing what we can to tie the mentor teacher program to the broad reform agenda for public schools, and we urge you to do the same.